

N<sup>o</sup> 6



Dr. *BISSE*'s  
S E R M O N  
A T T H E  
V I S I T A T I O N at *Hereford*.





*Pride and Ignorance the ground of  
Errors in Religion.*

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A  
**SERMON**

PREACHED at the  
**Primary Visitation**

OF THE  
Right Reverend Father in GOD,


**P H I L I P,**  
Lord Bishop of *Hereford*,

Held at the  
CATHEDRAL CHURCH in *Hereford*,  
*August 14. 1716.*

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By *THO. BISSE*, D.D. Preacher at the  
*Rolls*, and Chancellor of the said Church;  
and Chaplain in ordinary to His Majesty.

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L O N D O N: 

Printed by *W. B.* for HENRY CLEMENTS at  
the *Half Moon* in *St. Paul's Church-yard*. 1716.

Truth and Ignorance the ground of  
Errors in Religion.

# SERMON

PREACHED at the

Primary Visitation

OF THE

Right Reverend Father in GOD,

PHILIP

Lord Bishop of Hereford,

Held at the

Great Church in Hereford

August 14. 1716.

Preacher at the  
Great and Chancel Church;  
His Majesty.




Printed by W. A. for Henry Gurnett  
at the Great Church and 1716.



## I TIM. VI. 3, 4.

*If any man teach otherwise,  
and consent not to wholsom  
words, even the words of our  
Lord Jesus Christ, and to  
the doctrine, which is accor-  
ding to godliness, he is proud  
knowing nothing.*

 S in these words is contained a de-  
scription of the christian religion, of  
its saving power and its divine au-  
thor; for a doctrine it is *according to  
godliness, teaching wholsom words, even the  
words of our Lord Jesus Christ*; so is there  
likewise given a character of its adversaries,  
into which there go two remarkable ingredi-  
ents, pride and ignorance: *They are proud,*  
B *know-*

## Pride and Ignorance the

*knowing nothing.* A character, which if given to these refiners upon reason by the greatest among men, would be resented as the highest indignity; nevertheless this character must be submitted to by them, as true, being declared by the spirit of truth, who cannot lye; and who neither values nor fears the resentment of these his enemies, who will *be found lyars unto him.*

*This character* then being *true*, as we are commanded to *rebuke such sharply*, so it will not be unuseful in this infected age to take a fuller view of those two bitter ingredients, the common sources of infidelity; that so if we find the least tincture thereof arising in our selves, we may in season apply a cure; or if we find it in others, as we too often do, we may, according to advice, *mark such, and avoid them.*

Rem. 16.  
17.

We shall not at present enlarge upon the character of the christian religion, a system of wholsom and divine truths, spreading its saving health among all nations; which to speak of, as the time would fail me, so if *I spake with the tongue of men and of angels*, I should be far unequal to that inexhaustible theme: But I shall only consider at present the character of its adversaries, so remarkably set

down

down in the text. They are 1<sup>st</sup> proud. 2<sup>dly</sup>, ignorant. *They are proud, knowing nothing.*

By the persons, who *consent not to the wholsom words of our Lord Jesus Christ*, I shall understand not only direct infidels, who reject them in general; but also those here-ticks who dispute his fundamental doctrines, those pillars upon which the christian religion is built. For the attempts of these latter are to be looked upon as no other than those of blind *Sampson*, who shake with all their might these main pillars, desperately resolving to take vengeance on their enemies, though they themselves are sure to be crushed together under the ruins.

Now these, as we said, are marked out with a double character. And

1<sup>st</sup>, *They are proud*, or as he describes the same elsewhere, *they are puffed up by a fleshly mind.* Col. 2. 18.

As spiritual pride is the worst in its kind, so is it found in its highest degree in sceptical men; for they set up their knowledge in opposition to the saving knowledge of God, they reject those wholsom words, which are known to be the words not of man, but *even of our Lord Jesus Christ.*



## Pride and Ignorance the

In the controversies about mere human knowledge, *in the oppositions of science truly so called*, scepticism or heterodoxy hath this good appearance, that in these disputes man only striveth with man, setting up notion against notion, and scheme against scheme; in these the *potsherd* only *striveth with the potsherd* of the earth. But when man controverts the fundamentals of the catholick faith, the unalterable scheme of divine truths, he incurs that dreadful woe, that he *striveth with his maker*.

Therefore when these men make insurrection against the governours of the Church with the ignominious titles of creed-makers, or arbitrary imposers of articles, or setters forth of strange doctrines, and the like, that reply of *Moses* is abundantly sufficient, *why murmur ye against them?* For they, as *Moses* and *Aaron* were, are but God's ministers; yea, woe is unto them if they preach not those wholsom words which Christ spake, and promulge those Laws which he hath ordained in his Church. The murmurings then of all such, whatever they give out, are not against the antient fathers, nor our late reformers; no, their *murmurings are not against man, but against the Lord*.

But



But now what pride is that, what in kind or degree that tempts man to set up his understanding against him that made it; to set upon those wholsom truths, which Christ the word of truth has affirmed, and moreover sealed, as it were, with his own signet; I mean the test of miracles, to set upon these truths a presumptuous negative, a sentence of impossibility, yea the brand of a contradiction? *Who or what art thou, O man! that thus replyest against God?*

But we shall view the pride of these scorers in another light, not by considering its opposing it self to the direct authority of God, which gives it an air of phrensy rather than of passion; but likewise its opposing it self to the joint and uninterrupted submission, consent and attestation of all the antient and modern fathers and bishops of the Church, who have explained it by their interpretations, defended it by their apologies, ratified it by their authority, and sealed it by their martyrdom.

Now among the adversaries there are some found of so much manners, or of so little courage as not to reject the whole of christianity; but yet if they consent to the wholsom words which Christ spake, they will make him to speak as it pleaseth them; Christ may speak, but they will interpret. The interpretations

of fathers, the usages, worship, and decrees of the primitive church, that strong witness of antiquity, weigh nothing with the man of FREE THOUGHT. Against all such he protests in the same words, tho' with far unequal reason, as St. *Paul* did against the glosses and traditions of the *Jewish* doctors; declaring, that *after the way, which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers.*

The haughtiness of this temper, so common in the courts of religion, cannot be better exposed, than if seated in any civil judicature. For in all these, from the inferiour court up to the most honourable senate, there is a recourse had and a submission made to precedents, to the rules and decisions of predecessors. In these none was ever found so wise in his own conceit, or so unwise in his attempt, as to set up his single opinion against the united judgments of all that went before him, or even all that sat with him. Into these assemblies scepticism or even singularity dares not enter, as knowing, that it would immediately, by the over-ruling of precedents, or plurality of voices, be hissed out of its place. No: Among the judgment-seats that rule the affairs and controversies of men, there was never tolerated *the seat of the scorner.* Now that pride, which is intol-  
rable

able in the councils of men, 'tis hard, that men should think less so, when it intrudes into the *sanhedrim*, to disturb the church of the living God.

But be that as it will; doubtless he, who at this distance of time shall pretend to see more clearly into the sense of scripture, than those primitive writers, that stood so near that great light, which in the first century (those days of inspiration) shone round about upon the church; he, who shall pretend in this obscure age to know what is the mind of the Spirit delivered by the apostles, better than their contemporaries or immediate successors, who were ordained by their hands, and instructed from their mouths; he, who shall bid defiance not only to any one of the antient fathers, those celebrated champions of the truth, but to them all together even ranged as it were in battel, a noble army of martyrs; is not he proud? *Tea proud and haughty, scorner is his name, who thus deal-eth in proud wrath*, or as it is in the margin, in the wrath of pride, of spiritual pride.

But as is his pride, so is his ignorance, upon which it is grounded: For,

2<sup>dly</sup>, *He knoweth nothing.*

This is true in regard, 1<sup>st</sup>, To the extent of his knowledge, as to what he knows.



2<sup>dly</sup>, As to the manner of his knowledge: *For he knoweth nothing, as he ought to know.*

1<sup>st</sup>, As to the extent of his knowledge he may be said to know nothing; and that also two ways. 1<sup>st</sup>, In respect to the general knowledge of all things. 2<sup>dly</sup>, To the actual knowledge of other men.

1<sup>st</sup>, Then the proud and haughty scorner knows nothing in respect to the general knowledge of all things.

Now one chief branch of mans knowledge is founded on the remembrance of things past contained in history, which in its perfection reaches back but to a few thousands of years. And in this table of antiquity there are many large blanks either omitted by neglect, or effaced by time, or devoured by the overflowings of barbarism. So that upon these and other accounts it may be affirmed, that the things recorded in history bear no proportion to those, that are forgotten. Besides had man a complete register of all things that were ever done or happen'd under the sun, yet alas! what is this knowledge compared to the knowledge of all things before the sun was? Yea, what is all antiquity to eternity?

But then as to the knowledge of futurities, of things that are to come, there is a bar set,  
a cur-



a curtain drawn, between this day and even the morrow. Man is ignorant, not only what shall be, but whether he himself shall be, on the morrow. His prescience is but conjecture, and his best foresight is built upon probabilities. But knowledge in general takes in both things past, all the affairs of nations, all the actions of men, and also things to come, which (for ought we know) may be more extended in time and manifold in the number, than those that are past. *This knowledge is too excellent for man; he cannot attain unto it, being to be found only in the mind of him, who was, and is, and is to come.*

And as man may be said to *know nothing* in the history of time, so may he still with more propriety in the history of nature. For notwithstanding the number and enlargement of the sciences, those glorious testimonies of the understanding of man; yet ask the greatest sage, that shines at this day in the schools of learning, and he will confess, that as to the extent of his knowledge, the things known are nothing in comparison to the things that are yet undiscovered: And as to the perfection of this his knowledge, that even in these things, the works of nature, *he knoweth nothing, as he ought to know.* So then from this short survey of mans knowledge,

ledge, it appears narrow, dark, and as it were, negative. Many things in the history of times are forgotten and obliterated: Many in the history of nature lie folded up, unknown and unthought of. And what is this view of mans knowledge, thus made up of defects, when compared to the perfect comprehension of all things? Or to speak more properly, what is ignorance to omniscience?

But to come nearer to the point, the knowledge of the scriptures, those wholsom words, from which the proud sceptick dissents, and over which he triumphs, herein he may still with the greatest propriety be said to *know*  
 1 Tim. 3. *nothing*. For *without controversy great is*  
 16. *the mystery of godliness*, fully known to none but to the Spirit of truth, the enditer of it; nor in part but to those, to whom he shall reveal it. The scripture is called, and it is justly so called, an inexhaustible mine of mysterious truths; and those holy labourers, who have *digged deepest into it as for hid treasures*, who furnished with languages and all other preparatory sorts of learning, have spent their days in searching into it, in looking backwards and forwards, and thro' all the parts thereof; these being assured of the certainty, and astonished at the harmony of what they see, are wrapt up in faith and adoration

ration at those things, they comprehend not: Being satisfied, that as *no man can see God*, so neither can he view these truths, *and live*.

From this incapacity of man to comprehend the whole mystery of redemption, at least in this life, I shall only make this reflection on these great pretenders to reason, that no man can upon any principles of it whatsoever be a rational infidel, or by any logick justify his denial of christianity. Indeed a man, who seeth only in part, may be a rational believer; he may rationally consent to the whole of revelation, grounding his faith in the rest upon the word of God, for whom reason it self assures him, 'tis impossible to lye. But he, that knoweth but in part, cannot be a rational unbeliever. He cannot without a full comprehension of the whole, deny the whole; which yet 'tis remarkable, is the constant method of unbelievers. Whenever their faith staggers at any part of scripture as an *hard saying*, it stops not there, but without farther examinations proceeds to give judgment against the whole as a falshood or contradiction. This is so unjust a proceeding, so false a reasoning, that no strength of logick can bear them out in, nor all its subtlety bring them off. Wherefore



## Pride and Ignorance the

fore we conclude, that what was said of pride, may be said of its offspring, infidelity; that *it was not made for man.*

But as the knowledge of these men, when compared to the extent of knowledge in general is nothing, yea less than nothing and vanity; so,

2<sup>dly</sup>, It is found generally far inferior to that of other men.

Now this being a matter of fact, to the proof of it I might bring forth a list of those antient worthies, who fought the cause of christianity, *avenging the quarrel of the Lord's covenant.* Many were the scoffers in the first ages of the church, and those far more superior in learning than in number to the modern. So that in respect of those learned and mighty warriors upon the faith, it might be said, that *there were gyants in those days.* And yet were they all vanquished by the servants of the living God, the primitive fathers, whose defences, and apologies, those monuments and trophies of their learning, are with us to this day: Whereas on the side of heresy not one victory is found, not one triumph upon record. An instance to the world, that the champions for infidelity have been generally of the same mould and might with those in the apostles days,

that



that they are *proud boasters, speaking great swelling words*, that is, big in defiance, but failing in execution.

'Tis an observation in philosophy, that a shallow insight into nature, when pretending too far, corrupts into atheism: And 'twill be found as true in divinity, that a superficial knowledge, when aspiring too high, degenerates into scepticism. This is apparent, that these men constantly pass by with scorn that preliminary learning, both of the school-men and the fathers, as dry and voluminous; which men, that wear the character of learned, pass thro' with regard and application.

As to the learning of the schools, once the great, too great admiration of the world, as it is now its great, too great neglect; these men wholly tread it under foot, comparing it to cobwebs, the work of spiders, of great subtlety, but little substance, of no service in life but of disservice in religion, condemning it in the Apostle's phrase as mere *doting about questions and strife of words*. Now in favour of this learning I crave leave to make this short observation, that all its prodigious subtlety, though reigning so many hundred years, and in so many nations; and moreover, though of so disputing a genius, yet was never once the parent of heresy; so that if  
its

its curious productions were cobwebs, yet its nature was not venomous: Whereas the clear reasoning of our free-thinkers disentagled, as they boast, from all subtlety and strife of words, brings forth hereticks day by day. Wherefore to use the prophet's comparison, if those learned men did (as by these scorers they are accused) *weave the spiders web*, on these their accusers it may be retorted that they *hatch cockatrice eggs*; and if one of them be *crushed* we shall find it naturally *break forth into a viper*.

But then as to the writings of the fathers, whose webs (to carry on the prophet's allusion) *are become garments*, a substantial and well-wrought covering and ornament to the spouse of Christ, these celebrated works, which they cannot call works of vanity, they attack as works of iniquity. For they search not into the excellency of their substance, which in many parts is of wrought gold, but only into the borders, if they can espy therein a corrupt reading, *a spot or wrinckle, or any such thing*. A few of these defects, if dropt there, thro' imperfection, from which no writing of man is exempt; or what is most frequent if made thro' misconstruction, from which not the writing of God himself is secured, these shall embolden them to condemn all those glorious

rious author's in the lump, to pass sentence upon them as impostors, as *deceiving and being deceived*. Thus a set of invectives, a quiver filled with these arrows, even bitter words against these holy and learned writers, is that ordinary furniture of learning, the chief armour of all the scoffers, which make war upon the christian religion.

But farther, as these men appear not a little ignorant in the art of war by thus attacking, and that with so small force the catholick church, whose *foundations are upon the holy hills*, and whose towers are armed with so many watchmen, an enterprize without proportion or probability; so do they appear not less unskilful builders in erecting schemes for themselves, and that not only by the general incoherence and deformity of their building, but often by the narrowness of their foundation, ridiculous as well as unsound. For what masterly architects must they be accounted, who attempt to raise a magnificent scheme of heresy upon a single word, a vast superstructure balanced upon a point? What pretenders are these who thus, as it were, by a presumptuous imitation of the builder of the universe, *hang their world upon nothing*?

Truly if we look not upon their works, but the very frame and composition of their tempers,



pers, we shall find in all men, that have sceptical inclinations, an inborn meanness and littleness of soul, that renders them incapable of any large and noble views, of any thing that is great in knowledge as well as in virtue. For 'tis in one as in the other, see we not some whose whole ambition it is to make a figure in vice, to be marked out for a course of debauchery, in it self vile, senseless, and mischievous? So there are men that are proud to become considerable for the extravagance of their opinions, as the other of their actions; to be originals in wickedness of principles, as the other of practice; and that are not indeed capable of being known, but by *being thus contrary to all men*. Now in both these kinds of men there is, I say, an original littleness, meanness, and narrowness of capacity. For we always find in a truly great and generous mind, a mind indued with noble instincts and passions, that it aspires to be distinguished in that, which is excellent; to ascend above, not to divide from, mankind; and thinks it a greater honour to be a follower in the train of truth, and to wear the livery of virtue, than to be the most illustrious, that is, the most infamous leader in irreligion. That noble declaration of King *David*, which he proclaimed to all *Israel*, may  
without

without a blush be professed by all orders of christians: *I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell, yea than to preside, in the tents of ungodliness.*

But as these men may be justly termed ignorant, with regard to the extent of their knowledge and capacity, which are both generally narrow, far disproportioned to their pretensions; as they may be said to know nothing in comparison of what they affect to know, and of what others really do know; so likewise may they,

2<sup>dly</sup>, With respect to the manner of their knowledge, because *they know nothing, as they ought to know.*

Neither will we now insist on their error in setting out, that they come furnished neither with the qualifications required by God, holiness of life, and humility of soul, and the like; neither with those aids of human learning, required by man; without either of which, much more then of both, Men may labour in the scriptures night and day, *be ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge* 1 Tim. 2. 4. *of the truth*; we will not, I say, now complain so much, that in the search of divine truths they omit the proper means, as that they propose quite a wrong end. For when they shall propose to come at clear ideas in pure matters of belief, and to have just con-

ceptions of things, which they themselves call incomprehensible; when they shall confound science with faith, by arguing from one to the other, so contrary to the definitions of each; in a word, when in pursuit of distinct notions, they shall confound first principles; when this inconsistency and contradiction shall so apparently be found in men's reasonings, doth it not argue, if not an ignorant, yet an inverted brain? May not *Festus's* reflection on *Paul* be justly applied to these, that they are *besides themselves*? And if they have the reputation of much learning, that this hath *made them mad*? A common and seemingly natural judgment upon the intellectual pride of the *wise, the scribe, and the great disputers of this world*. For upon the voluptuous and libertines we see no such visitation; perpetual excess, indeed, often wears down the strongest parts, and clouds the brightest understanding, so as to sink men almost into the level and clan of brutes. Whereas in scoffers, those libertines in thinking, pride and ill principles naturally ferment, heat, and inflame their understandings, so as to blow them into a wild conceitedness, that they are as gods, knowing good and evil.

But the truth is, what they do know, or desire to know, is only evil: For besides that natural meanness and inferiority of parts in

these



these men, there is also a judicial wickedness and perverseness of heart; which never interprets, but to wrest; never observes, but to censure: Whose common-place-book, that treasury of their observations upon authors, is nothing but a digest, or rather medley of errors, slips, and misconstructions. The method of these fishers, whether out of the scriptures, fathers, or councils, being contrary to the kingdom of heaven; for these *gather the bad only into vessels, but cast the good away.*

Let us now endeavour to apply a remedy to this evil spirit of scepticism and unbelief, in order whereto I shall beg leave to recommend these considerations. And 1<sup>st</sup>, Let us consider and weigh the extream danger of it.

Tho' superiority of understanding is generally thought to afford the fairest pretensions to pride, more than all the other accomplishments of nature, or endowments of fortune, yet it is the most fatal of them all; because as *this pride, like all other sorts of it, goes before a fall, so that fall is always great, seldom recoverable.* For it is not a fall from the right hand of power into poverty and disgrace, it is not a falling headlong from that steep precipice of ambition to be tossed down below with scorn among *the noise of the waves and madness of the people*; no, it is a falling infinite.

finitely worse, it is a falling into apostasy, which resembles rather the fall of *Lucifer* from heaven, who found no redemption. And if we review the fates of all those, who since the beginning of the church have stood upon the long and black roll of apostasy, which of them ever recanted? Not that the door of mercy is barred against the repentance even of such, or not to be found by all living flesh; but alas! how shall it be found unless they seek? And how shall they seek unless they believe?

And here seeing the prodigal son was accepted, but prophane *Esau* found no repentance, we cannot but complain that so many of the sons of men are not content to go on, like the former, in an undisturbed course of riotous living, without turning also, like the latter, scoffers and infidels; thus foolishly adding to the vices of practice those more horrid and unprofitable ones of speculation. As for libertinism, which is but practical atheism, this verily in this life has some reward; but as for infidelity, which also is but speculative atheism, this is a profession irksom and dry, without any tincture or ingredient of pleasure. For let them shew me what pleasure there can be in blaspheming, in *talking against the most high*? What one sense is gratified in the ridicule of the scriptures? What humour or relish is there in exposing the great redeemer as

a deceiver, his miracles as forgery, and his religion as imposture? What ornament to their feasts, what entertainment to their friends can be added by the table-talk of those mercenary men; who are witty upon religion for subsistence, and are literal imitators of *Esau, for a morsel of bread selling their immortal birth-right?*

As for the poor of the earth, who not only see but groan under the unequal dispensations of providence; these, if any, may have some seeming temptations to be infidels. The hungry and naked, which lye at the gates without food or covering, whilst they behold within the great despisers of heaven, *cloathed in fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day*; these may with more shew argue, is there a God that judgeth in the earth? But for the rich and the mighty, who have thousands of demonstrations for the being of a God, and ten thousand for his goodness and mercy, and not the least against either; but that they themselves are so undeservedly prosperous, so undeservedly exalted; let not these be infidels, infidelity wholly misbecomes them. If, as we shewed, it *was not made for man*, most assuredly it was never made for these men.

But 2<sup>dly</sup>, Let them consider, that as this pride is most dreadful in its punishment, so is it most irrational in its proposal. For it must



propose one of these two things, either quite to raze the foundations of the christian religion, so as to destroy it from off the earth; or else to change its form, so as to cast it into a better mould, a more rational system. Now as to its form, this is declared unchangeable; and should not only men of like ignorance with our selves, but should an angel descend from heaven, *to preach any other*, he  
*Gal. i. 8.* and his attempt would *be accursed*. And as to its foundations, these two are immoveable; and should not only men of like impotence with our selves, but should all the powers from hell arise against it, neither should they prevail. And how senseless a thing is it then for any single person to persecute Christ, and like infatuated *Paul*, *to kick against the pricks*?

One may reasonably judge, that the utmost view of such an one is only this, by the extravagance of his attempt to raise to himself an everlasting name. But granting the success, and that a man might become as famous as *Arius* of old, or *Socinus* in these latter days; yet what is this lasting fame but a monument of infamy? What is it but a brand in history, a curse upon record? To be enrolled indeed among the champions of truth, and to have one's name and acts a perpetual theme of praise throughout the church, so that *all generations shall call one blessed*; this is true

renown,

renown, truly great, and worthy of the greatest among men. How illustrious is the table of these when set over-against the register of infidels? Those compose a catalogue of martyrs, these, as it were, a kalendar of malefactors; the former are blessed, the latter are condemned for evermore.

Since then this pride is so vain in its proposals, so dreadful in its punishment, and withal so very infectious in its nature: Let each of us take heed to watch over our own souls, not only to guard them from without, from this *pestilence that now walketh at noon day*; but from that radical pride, that seed of unbelief lurking in the heart; which like that of faith, tho' a small seed, may thro' neglect, grow up into a great tree: For the extirpation and killing whereof, next to prayer and humility, those remedies of the gospel, I shall recommend only this one consideration, namely, that our understandings are created, that they are made of such a size and comprehension, and that they have their fixed bounds, and as it were a certain horizon, round which they can view, and no farther. For instance, when we would meditate upon what we call eternity, which yet is far less astonishing than the mysteries of revelation, the deep things of God; and when in order thereto standing upon the two bounds of time, the creation and

dissolution of the world, we look backwards or forwards into that great abyfs, that infinite ocean, that reaches *from everlasting to everlasting*, we are utterly loft and swallowed up, and are compelled, like the Dove sent off in the flood, to return to the ark; that is, to retire to faith, contenting our selves with this truth; that he who *inhabits eternity*, has bounded man's understanding as well as his days; and that as it was impossible for him to give an infinite knowledge to the work of his hands, even angels and arch-angels, so it was infinitely gracious that he gave such a knowledge unto man, that herein he is made *but little lower than the angels*. And for man to remonstrate against the essential limits of his understanding, is in terms the same, as for *the thing formed to say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?*

Rom. 9. 20.

And now, my brethren, that are of the house of *Aaron*, the few moments of time that remain, it behoves me to apply the word of exhortation to our selves. We know, that we have bound our selves, before we were ordained to be preachers, to teach those things that are contained in the *articles, homilies, and liturgy*, of our church, or what is agreeable to the same, acknowledging these to be agreeable to the word of God. These things we *subscribed* to with our own hands: These



these things we *promised* with our own mouths. If any of our order complain of this as a restraint upon their native liberty, that they are hereby bound down from thinking and writing with the freedom of other men, let them complain of their own choice: for before they were admitted to this honour, of which they seem unworthy, *was it not in their own power?* But let them not complain: it is still in their own power. If they can get free from the restraints of their own conscience, the church retains them not, needs them not: let them quit her service, and depart.

But surely, my brethren, we ought to look upon these additional ties upon the clergy with another view, as a great guard and an happy preservative to our souls. For tho' the ecclesiastical laws, as all other, *be not in the first intention made for a righteous man, but* 1 Tim. i. 9. *for the lawless and disobedient*; yet they tend greatly to the security of the righteous. For if we look inwards upon our selves, we must be conscious, that whatever our treasure be, whatever our abilities to teach, we *have all but in an earthen vessel*, subject to errors 2 Cor. 4. 7. and frailties even as others. And if we look outwards upon the examples of heretical and false teachers, either antient or modern, we must observe with grief, that they have chiefly

ly arisen out of our own tribe: a consideration sufficient to warn and to humble all flesh before God, but *us* above all. Are then these hands bound down by *subscriptions*? I thank God, that they are thus bound: neither would I, were it put to my choice to be loosed from these sacred indentures, and to serve at the altar without covenants, to preach without limitations, would I accept the offer. No; these ties, which the church hath put upon us at our entrance into her honourable service, are not as chains cast upon slaves, but these *bands are the bands of love*; she designed them for our security, as well as her own: and as such should we embrace them, and wear them with thankfulness all the days of our ministry.

However as to our liberty in preaching, I speak with regard only to the subjects of it, I beg leave to put you in remembrance of two things:

1<sup>st</sup>, That we beware of that caution, which has of late years been so dinned into the ears of the clergy, that they would do well to let alone the doctrinal and mysterious points of religion, as nice, useless, and oftentimes contentious speculations; and instead thereof to preach to the people only good plain practical morality, upon good moral principles levelled to their capacities; such as the  
practice

practice of sobriety, temperance and justice, and the other moral virtues, enforcing each from the reasonableness and nature of things and their natural consequences. These things, say they, should we preach, as *good and profitable unto men*; but the high and abstruser points of our creeds and articles we *should avoid, as knowing that they do gender strife, rather than godly edifying.*

But should these things, to be treated of in the method prescribed, be the only subjects of our preaching, the very heathen would far out-preach us. *Plato* and *Plutarch* among the *Greeks*, and *Cicero* and *Seneca* among the *Romans*, have from the topicks of natural reason enforced these duties or offices to much greater advantage, than all the fathers of the *Greek* and *Latin* church ever did, or affected to do. For they in speaking of them went upon other principles, upon arguments drawn from the glorious gospel of Christ: which indeed do ennoble and exalt all moral virtues, breathing into them a living spirit, a quickning energy; such as enables the preachers of them to out-write, as well as outlive, the most eloquent and exemplary among the heathen.

Besides the preaching up of a good moral life barely upon moral principles, belongs equally and in common to every sect of religion



gion under heaven. Can this then be urged as the proper business, the characteristick, the excellency of a preacher of the gospel? I should think it a very small excellency for a minister of Christ, should he preach ten thousand good moral discourses in a church, if the very same might as well be spoken by a *Jew* in a *synagogue*, or by a *Mahometan* in a *mosque*. Let those then, who are lifted in the cause of natural religion, whether *deists*, *socinians*, or *arians*, (for they all agree and all end in one;) let these give or receive this modern direction; let these preach, or exhort their followers to preach up the excellency, or in other terms, the sufficiency of a moral life: and let the antient *ethicks* taught at *Athens* and *Rome*, or the modern books of natural religion, be their employment in reading, and quotations in preaching. But we are preachers of an higher dispensation: the scriptures are our subject, and the fathers our patterns. Nay, we have patterns and guides of our own church and nation. Our great REFORMERS have in the *articles* and *homilies* shewed and prescribed to us, upon what subjects chiefly to preach, with what to edify the church of God. These subjects and these guides let us follow, being assured, that all preaching, however polite, unless grounded on faith, is vain; as all practice, how-

ever

ever exalted, unless also coming of faith, is vain. These moral virtues, however recommended by preachers, or practised by hearers, if they spring not of faith, our church scruples not to declare, that they have in them the nature of sin, rather than any excellency before God.

Here then lies the state of this matter. Practical preaching is doubtless most to be approved, as being most for the use of edifying. But then it must be built on christian principles, such as are the articles of the catholick faith: otherwise it cannot properly be either practical or edifying. And in this thing I should chuse rather to imitate the plainest orthodoxy, than to use or to abound in excellency of speech: so much are *the wholsom words of our Lord Jesus Christ, to be studied more than the enticing words of mans wisdom*; so much is orthodoxy to be preferred to all the oratory in the world. As then we all (I trust) consent to, so let us teach the words of our Lord and Master, which however sublime and mysterious, are nevertheless the only *wholsom*, or saving words: these only can be productive of a godly and christian life, such as will be accepted with God; and therefore they are defined *the doctrine which is according to godliness*; as it were, to distinguish it from the preach-

1 Tim. 6. 3.

preaching of morality on the principles of natural religion, which cannot produce such an effect.

2<sup>dly</sup>, The second caution I beg leave to mention, as to our liberty in preaching, is never to treat of or intermeddle with political matters, but only at the times allowed; and that as well out of an honourable regard to our high calling, as the indispensable duty we owe to the ROYAL injunctions.

Indeed did we consider only the dignity of our commission, that we are as really the ambassadors of Christ, as any other men are of the Kings of the earth; did we consider also the divinity of our doctrines, that they are really the words of Christ; surely there would be little need of injunctions to prevent our intruding into a province not our own, because in truth so much below our own. Did we at all consider, that we are set apart and hallowed, to handle the mysterious truths, the deep things of revelation, we should not design to pollute our hands with what is called POLITICKS, or to stoop to those degrading secular topicks, more accommodated to the *markets and corners of the streets*. I am sick at heart, to behold men ordained preachers in succession to and after the example of prophets, apostles, and fathers, descending to the level and language, I had almost said,

of



of gazetteers and libellers; by this condemnation rendring themselves, and in themselves their whole order (a sad, tho' unjust consequence) so little in the eyes of the people; by this rendring both themselves and their brethren, the whole house of *Levi*, so despised before all the congregation of *Israel*.

But, O thou, holy and eternal Spirit, who separating us to the ministry didst take us out of the world, cleanse our thoughts by thy holy inspiration, keeping them out of and above the world, out of the corruptions and above the policy or wisdom of the world; which in those, whom thou hast sanctified by baptism, *is foolishness with God*; but in us, whom thou hast also hallowed by ordination, is even foolishness with men. But do thou turn all our thoughts, views, and labours, to that great work alone to which we are ordained; do thou apply them to and assist them in the discharge thereof, namely, the edifying thy church, and defending her from all her enemies round about: for round about her many there be that are against her, and that always are so, being against her upon principle; the atheists as barely religious,—the infidels as christian, the hereticks as catholic, the papists as protestant, some protestants as episcopal, all the sectarists as national;

tional: so that she truly is, as thou hast said, and always will be in this. her militant estate here on earth, *as a besieged city*. But, O blessed Lord, as thou hast set superior watchmen upon her walls, and the inferior at her gates, so cause them to watch over her by night and by day. To this end, as thou hast separated us from the world, so unite and knit us to one another. Cause uniformity of doctrine in our preaching, and of discipline in our acting, to work together for the good and glory of thy church; that she may not always labour under the distress and disorders of a siege, but may come forth in the face of her enemies, the enemies of the catholick faith, *terrible as an army with banners*.

Lastly, unite the people to the clergy, as the clergy to one another; that henceforth we may act, live, and be as one. And so shall the people, *the house of Israel shall confess, that thy mercy endureth for ever*: but especially the clergy, *the house of Aaron shall confess, that thy mercy endureth for ever*. Amen.

F I N I S.



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